

## Remembering *Salt* How a Blacklisted Hollywood Movie Brought the Spectre of McCarthyism to a Small Canadian Town

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## RESEARCH NOTE / NOTE DE RECHERCHE

# Remembering *Salt*: How a Blacklisted Hollywood Movie Brought the Spectre of McCarthyism to a Small Canadian Town

**Ron Verzuh**

And though it's known to have it shown,  
Puts fear in rich men's veins –  
Let's let them know we want the show  
Of how a worker gains!<sup>1</sup>

POET E.M. NOBES, AMONG THOSE WHO TOILED at the giant metal smelter at Trail, British Columbia, penned those lines after Mexican-American trade unionist Anita Torres visited the smelter city in January 1954 to promote the blacklisted movie *Salt of the Earth*. Torres and her husband Lorenzo were part of a violent fifteen-month-long strike in the early 1950s at the Empire Zinc mine in Bayard, New Mexico. Nobes and other members of Local 480 of the International Union of Mine, Mill and Smelter Workers (Mine-Mill) were moved by her recollection of company and police harassment, the use of scabs, and a public campaign to discredit her union. She explained how the men and women of Mine-Mill Local 890 faced down “machine guns and police goons” and even went to jail.<sup>2</sup> Torres depicted a struggle that was at the dark heart of Cold War political intolerance in North America as she described the fight against the anti-Communist Taft-Hartley Act. Passed in 1947, the law seemed designed to undo much of what the pro-labour Wagner Act had done in 1935. Torres also highlighted the case of Clinton Jencks, a Mine-Mill representative

1. E.M. Nobes, poem entitled “Salt of the Earth,” *Commentator*, September 1954.
2. “Anita Torres Tells of Jencks’ Battle To Free Her People,” *BC District Union News*, 29 January 1954.

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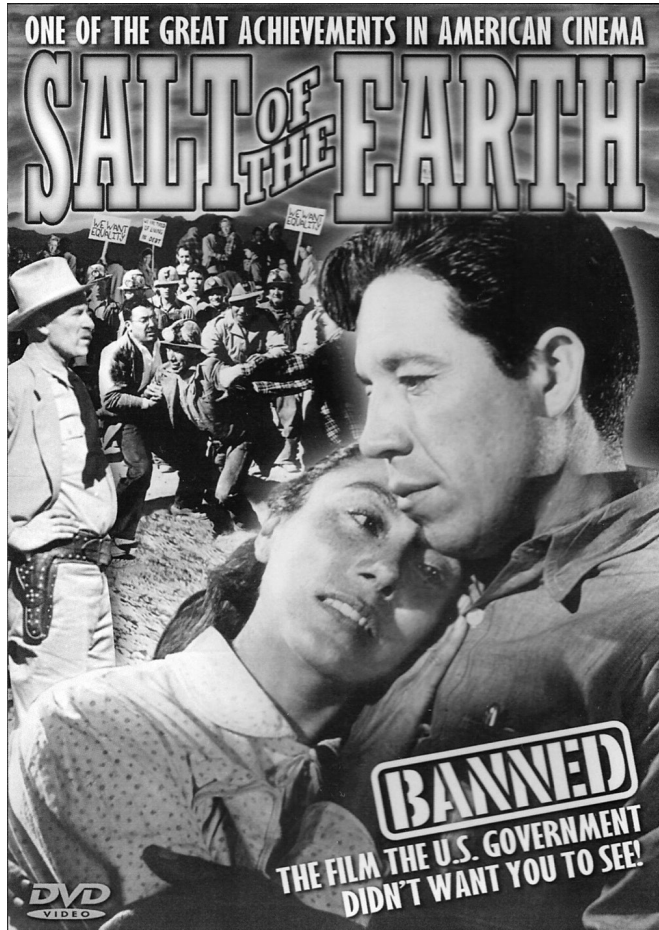
Ron Verzuh, “Remembering *Salt*: How a Blacklisted Hollywood Movie Brought the Spectre of McCarthyism to a Small Canadian Town,” *Labour/Le Travail* 76 (Fall 2015): 165–198.

The original poster promoting *Salt* noted that it was “banned.”

In fact there was no legal ban, but rather a McCarthyite fear campaign to stop the film from being shown.

The protagonists included a US Senator, HUAC, Hollywood studio owners, the FBI, the projectionists’ union, and the media.

Courtesy of United Steel Workers.



who was arrested and jailed under Taft-Hartley, and she recounted the battle to make *Salt* – a film that depicted the strike – and the ordeal of the men and women who helped make it.

The Kootenay region had welcomed other American visitors as far back as the days when the Canada-United States border was porous, making it easy for prospectors to come and go in search of precious metals. Some of those who greeted Torres had relatives who remembered the mid-1890s when copper king Fritz Augustus Heinze built the smelter and encouraged his miners to migrate from Butte, Montana, to the isolated mountainous West Kootenay district a dozen kilometres from the international boundary. Schooled in the harsh realities of mining and smelting confrontations in the American West, some of these migrants stayed in the area and they helped cultivate a working-class culture, including a sense of the need for a more radical approach to



Anita Torres (far left) at a Mine-Mill banquet in Vancouver before visiting Trail in January 1954. An unknown couple is in the middle. Mine-Mill regional director Harvey Murphy is at far right. Courtesy of United Steel Workers and Anita Torres.

achieving their workplace goals. When Local 480 was certified in 1944 after a six-year fight with a patriarchal smelter owner, the credit for the tenacity of union organizers was due in part to smelter workers' memory of the smelter city's radical past.

As Torres addressed several of Trail's 4,000 workers at the Consolidated Mining and Smelting Company of Canada or Cominco (now owned by Teck Resources Ltd.), they listened attentively to this "heroine of Mine-Mill." After her speech, Mine-Mill Ladies Auxiliary Local 131 presented Torres with two blankets, an appropriate gift since she was experiencing her first Canadian winter and Local 480 treated her to a Trail Smoke Eaters hockey game, a sport she thought might be played on horseback.<sup>3</sup> Torres added a touch of optimism to lingering local fears. Like everywhere else, those fears included renewed world war, the atomic bomb, post-war social uncertainty, continuing economic instability, and political intimidation. Inspired by her retelling of the events that led to the making of *Salt*, the leaders of Local 480 began to develop a strategy to resist the McCarthyism that was creeping across the border. A

3. "Anita Torres," *Commentator*, February 1954. Torres also visited Kimberley, Copper Mountain, and Britannia.

key part of that strategy was daring to sponsor a public showing of the only American film ever blacklisted in the US.<sup>4</sup>

The Kootenay region's workers' history of labour activism made them receptive to Torres's message. Smelter workers had fought for six years before and during World War II to get Local 480 certified, confronting a patriarchal smelter manager, an employer-created company union, and a red-baiting local newspaper. When Torres visited the smelter city, they had only recently emerged victorious from a fiery raiding war with the United Steel Workers of America (USWA). Local 480, with its large work force and its perceived Communist leadership, was an attractive target for Steel because it guaranteed a substantial increase in revenue from membership dues. Indeed, Trail and the much larger local at Sudbury, Ontario, were the jewels in the Canadian Mine-Mill crown. Taking advantage of local fears, the USWA was sanctioned by the anti-Communist Congress of Industrial Organizations (CIO) to raid Mine-Mill, one of eleven left-led unions it had expelled in 1949–1950. What the CIO and the USWA, using red-baiting tactics from the start of the raid, did not understand was that Trail's smelter workers had long ago accepted or at least tolerated Local 480 Communists who had negotiated reasonably good collective agreements since 1944. Fresh from the fight with the bigger union, but still under intense pressure from local anti-Communist forces inspired by the Cold War, Local 480 remained vigilant. Torres and the film she promoted could add to the union's arsenal as it strived to deter the red-baiters.

This article argues that despite the fears being spread by US Senator Joseph McCarthy and others, there were pockets of regional resistance to anti-Communism in Canada and some of that resistance took subtle cultural forms like the showing of the controversial film as local Communists struggled to survive Canadian McCarthyism. Some historians have focused on urban centres where there was more open debate about the repression of political thought and where differing views on the Second Red Scare were aired more readily and angrily than in the more conservative rural regions of the

4. Eric Arnesen, ed., *Encyclopedia of U.S. Labor and Working-Class History* (New York: Routledge, 2007), 1307, says *Salt* was "banned." I prefer the term blacklisted to describe the result of actions by politicians, governments, some unions, the Chamber of Commerce, and other institutional enemies of *Salt*. It also more accurately situates the actions of Hollywood studio operators who issued the Waldorf Statement in 1947 barring the Hollywood Ten from working in the motion picture industry. It was the start of a much more pernicious process of blacklisting anyone who by innuendo, association, or even appearance was considered a communist or fellow traveller. For more on the Hollywood blacklist, see Jeff Smith, *Film Criticism, the Cold War, and the Blacklist: Reading the Hollywood Reds* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2014) which offers a thorough review of writings through several waves of memoirs, histories, and reports. Reynold Humphries, *Hollywood's Blacklists: A Political and Cultural History* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2008) offers a critical and readable account, whereas Paul Buhle and Patrick McGilligan, *Tender Comrades: A Backstory of the Hollywood Blacklist* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1997) cover the individual stories of the blacklisted in their own words.

country.<sup>5</sup> Evidence uncovered for this article suggests that anti-Communist forces in small-town Canada – police, churches, a right-wing press, service clubs, the Canadian Legion, the Chamber of Commerce, and complicit politicians – created an even greater need to find ways to combat McCarthyism than had existed in large urban centres where progressive elements of the population could count on political allies to mount a strong resistance force.

In Canada, the literature dealing with the Cold War condemns Canadian McCarthyism. Historians Reginald Whitaker and Gary Marcuse, for example, argue that the Canadian government encouraged purges of left-wing radicals from the labour movement. “By the time of the Korean War,” they write, “the focus of the anti-Communist campaign had shifted from the ideological threat posed by Communists to the threat of industrial sabotage by individual Communists.”<sup>6</sup> Historian Larry Hannant, among others, has studied security screening in Canada, revealing that the detection of Communist affiliation became an obsession with RCMP surveillance teams who suspected that subversive elements of society were “meticulously organized, extensive, and explicitly ideological.”<sup>7</sup> Historian David MacKenzie argues in *Canada’s Red Scare 1946–1957*, that it “would be difficult to find another time in Canadian history when so many Canadians were suspected of so much disloyalty and subversion based on so little evidence of any wrong doing.”<sup>8</sup>

In the US, the Taft-Hartley Act helped foment what historian David Cate has called “the great fear.”<sup>9</sup> The mechanism for doing so included a government employee loyalty program equal to or more encompassing than the secretive screening that Hannant documented. “So compelling was the anti-red obsession,” Cate states, “that during the 1950s the courts in nine cases out of ten subordinated such basic protections to that predatory god, ‘national security.’”<sup>10</sup> Twice Pulitzer Prize-winning historian Richard Hofstadter had earlier argued that the McCarthyites used Communism as a false target with which to attack other undesirable elements in American society. “The deeper historical sources of the Great Inquisition,” as he called McCarthyism, “are best revealed by the other enthusiasms of its devotees: hatred of Franklin D. Roosevelt, implacable opposition to New Deal reforms, desire to banish

5. For an account of the First Red Scare in Canada see Daniel Francis, *Seeing Reds: The Red Scare of 1918–1919, Canada’s First War on Terror* (Vancouver: Arsenal Pulp Press, 2011).

6. Reginald Whitaker and Gary Marcuse, *Cold War Canada: The Making of a National Insecurity State, 1945–1957* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1994), 348

7. Larry Hannant, *The Infernal Machine: Investigating the Loyalty of Canada’s Citizens* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1995), 85.

8. David MacKenzie, *Canada’s Red Scare 1945–1957 – Historical Booklet No. 61* (Ottawa: Canadian Historical Association, 2001), 10.

9. David Cate, *The Great Fear: The Anti-Communist Purge Under Truman and Eisenhower* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1978), 368.

10. Cate, *Great Fear*, 368.



or destroy the United Nations, anti-Semitism, Negrophobia, isolationism.”<sup>11</sup> More recently, Red Scare historian Landon R.Y. Storrs agrees with Hofstadter, adding that the Second Red Scare was a “defence of class, religious, and racial hierarchies.” It was about advocating the values of the “white, Christian, heterosexual, *patriarchal* [her emphasis] family.”<sup>12</sup> Women, gays, and people of colour were their target; hunting Communists was a convenient excuse. Cold War historian Stephen J. Whitfield called the Red Scare period of the 1950s a “disgrace” and he suggested that the “Cold War also narrowed and altered American culture.”<sup>13</sup> This conclusion particularly referred to Hollywood film culture.

*Salt* entered the world of motion pictures at the height of film noir filmmaking during an era filled with fear of the atomic bomb, the Soviet Union, the Korean War, and spies and counterspies, a period when tough-guy anti-heroes stalked the silver screen in search of red saboteurs intent on destroying the American Way. As film historian David Spaner explains, film noir was largely the result of European filmmakers being transplanted to Hollywood to escape Nazism, bringing to US cinemas noir films like Fritz Lang’s *M* (1931), Billy Wilder’s *Sunset Boulevard* (1950), or Robert Siodmak’s *The Killers* (1946). Sam Fuller’s *Pickup On South Street* (1953), about a Communist spy and a police informer, and other films such as *Kiss Me Deadly* (1955) epitomized the genre. The latter, a Robert Aldrich film, involved the smuggling of a small metal box filled with explosive radioactive material from the Manhattan Project. It played on the fear of atomic secrets falling into Communist hands, a common theme of the times. The films of Orson Welles, Jules Dassin and Bertolt Brecht also “utilized the dark stylings of noir to portray an underside of American society, counter to the wholesome distortions that dominated screens in the 1950s.”<sup>14</sup>

*Salt* was not film noir. While it shared some of the techniques that Hollywood filmmakers had developed for that genre – the use of shadow, hidden camera angles, violent physical confrontations – it departed from the Cold War theme that permeated much of the films of that period. *Salt* also departed from the long history of Hollywood films that depicted working people in a negative light, suggesting that they were unintelligent, shifty, untrustworthy, and easily cowed when approached by political radicals. In his guide to films about labor, Tom Zaniello lists 350 examples of motion pictures that present

11. Richard Hofstadter, *Anti-Intellectualism in American Life* (New York: Random House, 1962), 42.

12. Landon R.Y. Storrs, *The Second Red Scare and the Unmaking of the New Deal* (Princeton and Oxford: Princeton University Press, 2013), 6.

13. Stephen J. Whitfield, *The Culture of the Cold War* (Baltimore: The John Hopkins University Press, 1991), 11.

14. David Spanner, *Shoot It! – Hollywood Inc. and the Rising of Independent Film* (Vancouver: Arsenal Pulp Press, 2012), 62.

“more balanced or even positive views” about workers that are often absent from traditional Hollywood movies.<sup>15</sup> Among them, he notes that *Salt* was a “film ahead of its time.”<sup>16</sup> If the makers of films like *Salt* followed a model, it was likely films associated with the British social realism of the 1930s or the Italian neo-realism of the 1940s, Zaniello argues.<sup>17</sup> But *Salt* was in many ways a uniquely American realist picture at a uniquely American moment. Like many of the other films listed, *Salt* borrowed on earlier filmmakers’ attempts to depict class struggle and worker solidarity, but it added “the related themes of sexual and ethnic repression,” thus rejecting the anti-worker traditions of the previous 50 years of US filmmaking.<sup>18</sup> For its efforts to interrogate the political sensibilities of the era, *Salt* met with what historian Ellen Schrecker calls the “injustice of McCarthyism.”

In her study of McCarthyism, Schrecker describes the “enormous opposition that the film encountered” as anti-Communist paranoia spread throughout the country.<sup>19</sup> Others argue that corporate America was also determined to crush the film for its cinematic display of what cold warriors considered the overt glorification of working-class unity as well as racial and gender equality. *Salt* exposed the underbelly of capitalism’s inherent inequality and the capitalist class and its political operatives responded by blacklisting it as a threat to its profit-making economic machinery. The film also fell squarely into the sights of J. Edgar Hoover, the notoriously anti-Communist director of the Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI), who, as Hollywood blacklist historian Reynold Humphries has noted, “saw any radical questioning of the status quo – such as campaigning for the rights of blacks and the struggle to organize working people into unions – as a form of dissidence. And dissidence led inexorably to subversion, the *raison d’être* of Reds.”<sup>20</sup>

In his book on the suppression of *Salt*, James J. Lorence documents how influential conservative forces in the film industry, including some Hollywood unions, set up roadblocks to prevent *Salt*’s production such as preventing its use of unionized film crews and blocking its release through established film distribution networks. Lorence also contends that as such it “provides a mirror of Cold War America that reflects not only the intense fear that gripped Americans in this period, but also the dark side of corporatist settlement

15. Tom Zaniello, *Working Stiffs, Union Maids, Reds and Riffraff: An Expanded Guide to Films About Labor* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2003), 1.

16. Zaniello, *Working Stiffs*, 328.

17. Zaniello, *Working Stiffs*, 8.

18. Mari Jo Buhle, Paul Buhle, and Dan Georgakas, *Encyclopedia of the American Left*, 2nd ed. (New York: Oxford University Press, 1998), 846.

19. Ellen Schrecker, *Many Are The Crimes: McCarthyism in America* (New York: Little, Brown, 1998), 331.

20. Humphries, *Hollywood’s Blacklists*, 2.



that locked business unionism and corporate power in a firm embrace in the 1950s.”<sup>21</sup> Historian Ellen R. Baker, who analyzed the effects of anti-communism on *Salt* and on American society, also assesses the cost of McCarthyism and concludes that it was very high for individuals, trade unionism, and other social justice movements. It meant the loss of a “vibrant alternative popular culture” and “a generation of committed organizers and a critical perspective on American political economy.”<sup>22</sup> Labour and film historians Paul Buhle and Dave Wagner concur, arguing that the 1,500 films, including *Salt*, that were left behind by the ostracized Hollywood Left, active since the earliest days in Tinsel Town, contain a rich legacy waiting to be rediscovered.<sup>23</sup>

Given the anti-communist political fervour described by these and other scholars, Local 480’s plan to show the film in Trail may have seemed an innocuous form of resistance. Still it was a risky business. After all, some members were long-time Communists who had felt the sting of official anti-communism. Mine-Mill had been active in the Kootenays for decades, coming first to Rossland, where in the late 1890s workers organized the first Canadian local of Mine-Mill’s predecessor, the Western Federation of Miners. In 1900–1901, the local was one of the first to strike for shorter work hours. Seventeen years later, smelter workers struck in Trail. At that time, socialist and labour martyr Albert “Ginger” Goodwin inspired a radicalism that survived years afterwards in the smelter city. In the 1930s Communists organized the local, fighting a company union to do so. In the 1940s they fought anti-Communist forces such as the local Catholic Church and in the 1950s it was the USWA raiders mentioned earlier. The raiders gained support from an interesting quarter: a young cold war journalist at *Maclean’s* named Pierre Berton. In 1951, Berton came to Trail to expose the red unionists as a national security threat because some Local 480 members worked at the company’s ultra-secret Project 9 plant. The US Army-financed plant’s purpose was to produce material destined for the Manhattan Project to make the atomic bomb.<sup>24</sup>

21. James J. Lorence, *The Suppression of Salt of the Earth: How Hollywood, Big Labor, and Politicians Blacklisted a Movie in Cold War America* (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 1999), 1.

22. Ellen R. Baker, *On Strike and On Film: Mexican American Families and Blacklisted Filmmakers in Cold War America* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2007), 251.

23. Paul Buhle and Dave Wagner, *Radical Hollywood: The Untold Story Behind America’s Favorite Movies* (New York: New Press, 2002).

24. Pierre Berton, “How a Red Union Bosses Atom Workers at Trail, BC,” *Maclean’s*, 1 April 1951, 7–10. Brian McKillop, *Pierre Berton: A Biography* (Toronto: McClelland & Stewart, 2008) suggests that a “striking feature of Berton’s almost forensic investigation of the labour struggle was the sympathetic and even-handed treatment he afforded Murphy.” He adds that Berton was “no red-baiter.” Local 480 leaders would have disagreed with this view. Craig D. Andrews, “Cominco and the Manhattan Project,” *BC Studies* 11 (Fall 1971): 51–62, provides perhaps the only in-depth study of the business arrangement that led to the creation of the Trail plant. Andrews’ findings are used extensively in other writings, including Jeremy Mouat, *The*

Maclean's Magazine, April 1, 1951

# How a Red Union Bosses Atom Workers At Trail, B.C.

Openly controlled by Communists, the Mine-Mill Union doggedly holds its grip on one of Canada's most vital industries. Its domain includes a carefully guarded heavy-water plant in the B.C. mountains. An anti-Communist rival claims a majority of the workers, but the Reds are still on top in a fight that could involve our security

By PIERRE BERTON

**I**N THE SMOKY little mountain town of Trail, huddled deep in the mountain recesses of B. C.'s Kootenay mountains, one of the most significant union struggles in modern history is being fought out against a backdrop of atomic secrecy, Communist infiltration and charges of political opportunism.

Here, the United Steelworkers of America, the continent's most powerful industrial union, is challenging the right of the 57-year-old International Union of Mine, Mill and Smelter Workers to bargain for the men who work for one of Canada's richest corporations, the Consolidated Mining & Smelting Co., a subsidiary of the Canadian Pacific Railway.

The contest at Trail is something more than just another union squabble. In the first place, the Mine-Mill union has, for more than a decade, been run by the Communist Party for its own purposes. In the second, Canada's first atomic plant is at Trail. C.M.S. has been producing heavy water for U. S. atomic research—perhaps for a hydrogen bomb—for almost eight years.

So far the Steelworkers have failed to unseat the Communist-led union. They were given the job in January, 1950, when the Mine-Mill union was expelled by the Communist Congress of Labor. But, after a year of B. C. Labor Board hearings, court cases, appeals and counter-appeals, the Mine-Mill union and its Communist-dominated executive is still legal bargaining agent for Trail's 1,000 workers—even though only 1,200 of them actually belong to it.

Although the Steelworkers, in a whirlwind campaign, were able to win 2,200 membership to their cause, the government-appointed Labor Relations Board of B. C. has declined to certify them. And the Trail employers—who themselves have as yet been given no opportunity to vote on which union they want to represent them.

Some strange things have been going on in B. C. since the union struggle in Trail began. A Liberal M.P. has come out publicly in favor of the Red-led union. A leading American Communist with a black patch over one eye, barred from Canada, has managed to stay at large four days in Trail. And the Canadian Congress of Labor has barely changed that C.M.S. has given aid and comfort to the Communist union for the sake of a "representation contract"—a charge vigorously denied by the company.



Communist Harvey Murphy runs the Mine-Mill Union which controls 4,000 workers at Trail, including those in secret Project 9—an atomic plant.

In the background looms the grey square tower of the company's landmark "Project 9" which has been producing heavy water for the U. S. since 1945. Project 9 and the great hydrogen plant with which it is linked, is set apart from the sprawling fertilizer plant and smelter works by a high racket fence, a sign that says "No Admittance Without Authority," several anti-fascist emblems, the RCMP, and an elaborate screening process and pass system—part of which is under FBI surveillance. But there is good reason to doubt that Project 9 has been wholly isolated from the Communists who run the Mine-Mill union.

The key men in the Trail Red are Communist Party members or Party liars. One of them works as an order in the heavy water plant itself. He was identified to this writer as a member of the Labor Progressive Party in 1945 and was recently on the executive of his union. Another works in the adjacent hydrogen plant as maintenance man. He is not known to be a Party member but has consistently followed the Party line and has distributed copies of the Stockholm Peace Petition within the plant itself.

The plant is vulnerable to sabotage because of the great square storage tank close by which holds 200,000 cubic feet of highly inflammable hydrogen. Nearby is an ammonium nitrate plant, producing thousands of tons of fertilizer. It can easily be converted to munitions-making. (It was a shipment of ammonium nitrate that blew up in Texas City in 1947, destroying much of the town.)

The smelter itself would be essential to Canada in the event of war. It processes all the base metals from the great Sullivan mine at Kimberley, 200 miles away. This mine is the world's largest producer of lead and zinc and produces half of Canada's silver. The mine is also operated by the Communist-led Mine-Mill union which is organized in gold and base metal areas throughout Canada—including the International Nickel Co. at Sudbury, Ont.

The significance of the atomic developments at Trail has not escaped the Communist Party. On March 10, 1950, its west coast organ, *The Pacific Tribune*, said editorially: "The atomic products of Chalk River and Trail can be made to serve the interests of humanity, but only if the shackles of big business within the labor movement are decisively smashed. That is why

Maclean's assigned Pierre Berton to write this anti-Communist story about Trail in the April 1, 1951 edition of Maclean's.

Local Communists had long learned to be on their guard, especially considering that their regional Mine-Mill director was Harvey Murphy, the wily chief negotiator for Local 480 since it was first certified in 1944. The self-proclaimed "reddest rose in labour's garden," Murphy was often labeled Canada's premier red in the press.<sup>25</sup> Since the early 1930s, local police officers had been under instructions to track his political activities, writing almost verbatim reports of his speeches and filing articles he wrote for the Communist press of the day. The top RCMP ranks considered him a danger to the country and the

*Business of Power: Hydro-Electricity in Southeastern British Columbia 1897–1997* (Victoria, BC: Sono Nis Press, 1997), specifically "Chapter 6 – Another War: The Second World War and its Legacy," 118–126. My own study of Project 9 appears in *BC Studies*, 186 (Summer 2015): 9–37. A shorter version is published in *Canada's History*, August/September 2015, 32–37.

25. Stephen L. Endicott, *Raising the Workers' Flag: The Workers' Unity League of Canada, 1930–1936* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2012), 101, provides a critical and sometimes intimate portrait of the reddest rose. Lita-Rose Betcherman, *The Little Band* (Toronto: Deneau, 1982) portrays Murphy's early days as a young Communist.

federal government of Prime Minister Louis St. Laurent agreed.<sup>26</sup> Nonetheless, Torres's story about the Local 890 strike, Jencks's jailing, and the making of *Salt* had emboldened Local 480.

After years of media and government compliance with the crusade to find a red under every bed McCarthyism might have seemed slightly diminished by the mid-1950s, but it was far from dead that winter.<sup>27</sup> In fact, 1954 was to prove one of the toughest years for trade unionists suspected of being left wing. As MacKenzie notes, it was difficult "for almost anyone, not just communists and sympathizers."<sup>28</sup> The Canadian Broadcasting Corporation (CBC) and the National Film Board of Canada fell under particularly harsh scrutiny, and red trade unionists were severely victimized, although they did have some dwindling political support. As Local 480's political ally, H.W. "Bert" Herridge, Member of Parliament (MP) for Kootenay West, included negative comments on McCarthyism in his regular column in the local's newspaper, the *Commentator*. "At stake," he wrote, "is a basic principle: Is Canada going to allow US congressional committees to put the finger on any Canadian, whether it be Gouzenko, Mike Pearson or plain John Smith, and ask him to submit to a witch-hunting cross-examination.... We want none of that in Canada."<sup>29</sup> His colleague Stanley Knowles, the young North Winnipeg MP who had won the seat vacated by the death of Cooperative Commonwealth Federation (CCF) founding leader J.S. Woodsworth, also took a public stand in opposition to "all efforts to establish McCarthyism in Canada."<sup>30</sup> But they were often lone battlers in the House.<sup>31</sup> Many CCF leaders – federal leader M.J. Coldwell, BC MP Angus McInnis, and future federal party leader David Lewis, for example – had been vociferous Communist fighters since the party began in the 1930s.

Locally, the press, the church, business associations, and Cominco managers fueled fears of communism. Canadians could watch "the unfolding spectacle

26. Thousands of pages of secret documents, which the author obtained from the Canadian Security Intelligence Service under Access to Information legislation, show that police officers reported on Murphy's union and political activities from as early as 1929. As Justice Minister in the Mackenzie King government, St. Laurent had willingly complied with anti-Communists using the Taft-Hartley Act to ostracize Communists. See "Reds Will Find It Hard To Enter Canadian Labor," *Trail Daily Times* (hereafter *TDT*), 12 March 1948.

27. "Senator Wants McCarthy Spending Budget Slashed," *TDT*, 5 January 1954.

28. MacKenzie, *Canada's Red Scare*, 25.

29. "Jottings from Ottawa," *Commentator*, February 1954.

30. "Keep McCarthyism Out of Canada!" *Commentator*, February 1954.

31. Knowles was an exemplary social democratic Member of Parliament, who distinguished himself during the 1956 pipeline debate as an expert in parliamentary procedure. He was made an Officer of the Order of Canada in 1985 after a political lifetime of representing the working people of Canada. See *Canadian Encyclopedia*, s.v. "Stanley Knowles," by Susan Mann Trofimenkoff, last modified 16 December 2013, <http://www.thecanadianencyclopedia.ca/en/article/stanley-knowles/>.

of McCarthyism” on radio and television or visit the cinema on the weekend to see Cold War propaganda films like *The Iron Curtain*. The film appeared in 1948 two years after defeated British Prime Minister Winston Churchill delivered a speech with that title to 40,000 Americans while visiting the US at the invitation of President Harry Truman. The film and perhaps indirectly the speech were based on the 1945 revelations about Communist spies emanating from Russian cypher clerk Igor Gouzenko in Ottawa.<sup>32</sup> Sensationalized newspaper headlines, such as those that appeared regularly in the *Trail Daily Times*, added to the building paranoia with regular reports on American nuclear bomb tests in the Pacific.<sup>33</sup> There was a renewed outbreak of hostilities between the Viet Minh, a nationalist coalition founded by Ho Chi Minh in 1941, and French colonial forces in what turned out to be a prelude to the Vietnam War. And, though a Korean War truce had been negotiated the previous summer, there were growing concerns that it was a shaky one.<sup>34</sup> As Local 480 leader Al King described the situation:

It was brother against brother in Trail in the '40s and '50s – a very unhappy time. All the preachers were preaching ... and the paper was flailing away at us and the company was putting out garbage ... warning people to beware the evil Communists.... But it was the Communists who built the goddamned union.<sup>35</sup>

Part of the “garbage” was a pamphlet written by Cominco assistant general manager W.S. Kirkpatrick, a future president of the Canadian Chamber of Commerce, which warned smelter workers to beware Communist infiltration. “Communism proposes to abolish our Canadian way of life,” Kirkpatrick wrote. “If they succeed, your freedom to bargain collectively will be at an end.”<sup>36</sup>

32. MacKenzie, *Canada's Red Scare*, 25. The film came on the heels of Winston Churchill's speech coining the phrase Iron Curtain. Note that some Cold War historians argue that the Gouzenko exposé of Communist spies in Canada hastened the Cold War.

33. By the time Local 480 members met Anita Torres, the *Trail Daily Times* had hit full acceleration on its bomb coverage, offering readers ten or more articles a month. Cold War scare tactics were standard fare in the daily, including this item: “If Attacked Russia Will Use Atomic Bombs Says Premier,” *TDT*, 28 April 1954.

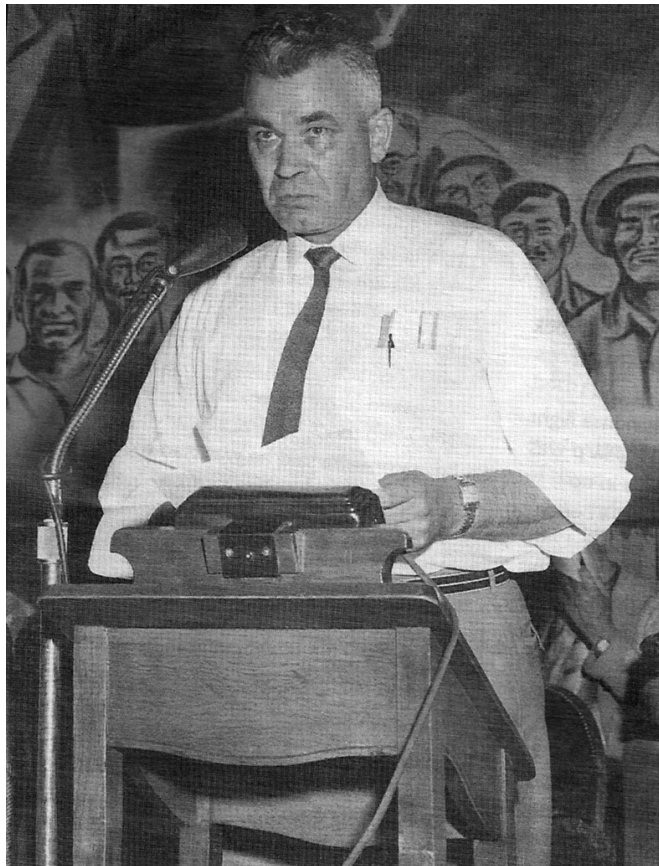
34. “Hydrogen Boom Blast Might ‘Shake’ Pacific – Mightier Than All World War II Bombs,” *TDT*, 9 January 1954; “Fighters, Bombers Strafe Communist Supply Lines,” “Red PoW Demands Stir New Tensions,” *TDT*, 7 January 1954. Also see Bruce Cumings, *The Korean War: A History* (New York: Modern Library, 2011) for a relatively recent history of what many historians call the forgotten war.

35. Al King, with Kate Braid, *Red Bait!: Struggles of a Mine Mill Local* (Vancouver: Kingbird Publishing, 1998), 74–75. Mike Solski and John Smaller, *Mine Mill: The History of the International Union of Mine, Mill and Smelter Workers in Canada since 1895* (Ottawa: Steel Rail Publishing, 1985) give a more detailed account of the national red-baiting program that had worked to undermine Mine-Mill.

36. W.S. Kirkpatrick, *Your Union and You* (Trail: Consolidated Mining and Smelting Company of Canada, 1948), 3.

**Al King, Local 480 president, was a Communist with close ties to the parent International Union of Mine, Mill and Smelter Workers.**

Courtesy of United Steel Workers.



The embattled Local 480 leadership had been a favourite target of William Curran, the editor of the *Trail Daily Times* throughout the 1940s, and the anti-red badgering continued uninterrupted when Dennis Williams replaced Curran as editor in the early 1950s.<sup>37</sup> The union local was also vulnerable to fallout in the Trail area generated by attacks at the national level from politicians like John Blackmore. That February, the Alberta Social Credit Party MP had called for a royal commission “to probe the origin of the ‘frightful Red menace’ in Canada.”<sup>38</sup> Any such probe would certainly have reached Trail’s

37. The author reviewed *TDI* editions from the late 1930s to the mid-1950s to draw these conclusions about the daily’s political views.

38. “Blackmore Seeks Red Menace Quiz,” *TDI*, 10 February 1954. It was the 1946 Kellock-Taschereau Commission investigating the Soviet spy allegations of Russian defector Igor Gouzenko that many say unleashed the Cold War. Janine Stingel, *Social Discredit: Anti-*



Communists. In fact, local police kept a steady eye on all reds in the area from the 1940s onward.<sup>39</sup> The probers were particularly concerned about Local 480's role in the local peace movement. Just before Torres arrived, the union had urged its members to "speak out for Peace."<sup>40</sup> A few years earlier it had helped found the Trail Peace Council following a visit by Canadian Peace Congress leader James G. Endicott who was regularly identified in the media as a red sympathizer.<sup>41</sup> The council was soon labelled red for collecting signatures on the Stockholm peace petition depicted in the media as a Communist plot. "If you supported peace," MacKenzie writes, "somehow that was interpreted as being soft on the Soviet Union."<sup>42</sup>

Indeed, such red-baiting tactics were hardly new for Local 480's Communist leaders, nor was their use of social and cultural weapons to ward off anti-Communist advocates in Trail. In 1952, led by the mercurial Harvey Murphy, the local had stalwartly supported the first of four concerts performed by the Soviet-sympathizing singer and actor Paul Robeson. The concerts, sponsored by Mine-Mill, took place from 1952 to 1955 at the Peace Arch near the Canada-US border at Blaine, WA. The union claimed that the 1952 event attracted 40,000 spectators, but local media reports were far less generous in their estimates. Local 480 leader Al King and several union members from the Trail area attended the concert and the local held fast throughout the four years in its support of Robeson's efforts to have his passport returned by the US State Department. Two years after that concert, and buoyed by its success, Local 480 would not back away from its plan to promote *Salt* in the Kootenays.<sup>43</sup>

In early 1953, Local 480 leaders had read union opinions from those who had screened the film privately. International Mine-Mill's *Union* editor Morris Wright called it "an exciting, warm-hearted story, not a documentary." The editor boasted that it was "the first time in the history of motion pictures – at least in this country [the US] – that a full-length movie has been made by a union."<sup>44</sup> Reading such high praise gave the Trail local a stimulating boost

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*Semitism, Social Credit, and the Jewish Response* (Montréal-Kingston: McGill-Queen's Press, 2000) describes Blackmore's other passion: anti-Semitism.

39. The author has reviewed thousands of secret police files procured under Access to Information legislation, many of them reporting on the activities of Kootenay Communists.

40. "A Peaceful World," *Commentator*, January 1954.

41. Stephen L. Endicott, *James G. Endicott: Rebel Out of China* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1980).

42. MacKenzie, *Canada's Red Scare*, 19.

43. For a full account of Local 480's role at Blaine, see Ron Verzuh, "Mine-Mill's Peace Arch Concerts: How a 'Red' Union and a Famous Singer-Activist Fought for Peace and Social Justice during the Cold War," *BC Studies*, 174 (Summer 2012): 61–99.

44. Morris Wright, "They're making a new kind of movie in Bayard," *Union*, 23 February 1953.





The banned movie finally opened at the Grande Theatre in New York City, but only thirteen theatres across the United States offered screenings. The Castle Theatre showing made it fourteen.

Courtesy of The Library of Congress.

for its intention to show *Salt*. Then on 14 March 1954, just two months after Torres's visit, following those first glowing *Salt* reviews in the labour press, and after suffering multiple attempts to suppress the release of what has been called a "celluloid document of socially conscious unionism," *Salt* finally premiered at New York City's Grande Theater. *Union's* Wright raved about the "overflow audiences" and claimed, perhaps over-enthusiastically that "many have called it 'the best picture I ever saw.'" <sup>45</sup> The reviews "in every New York daily paper" agreed that the film was "top-notch technically." The *Post* called it "solid picture making" and "not subversive in actual content." Addressing this latter concern, it told readers that it "certainly wouldn't harm you to see it and wonder why so many people have worked so hard to keep it from being made or shown at all." The *World-Telegram* said it "shows much less of repression, discrimination and violence than actually happened."<sup>46</sup>

The Canadian premiere took place at the Variety Theatre in Toronto on 9 August 1954 in spite of a boycott orchestrated by the projectionists' union on

45. Lorence, *Suppression*, back cover.

46. "'Salt of the Earth' finally on screen! Packs N.Y. theater every performance," *Union*, 29 March 1954.

orders from their New York office. As *Salt* director Herbert Biberman remembered it, they were “relegated to a miserable theatre ... with equipment so poor that it was almost impossible to understand the dialogue.”<sup>47</sup> The Toronto public broke the boycott, said *Union*, but the paper admitted that the showing had been “greatly hindered by opposition from the projectionists’ union, an outfit controlled by the big movie companies.” CBC film critic Nathan Cohen gave the film a fifteen-minute review, calling *Salt* “an exciting experience, a deeply human drama in the documentary manner perfected by the Italians in such masterpieces as *Open City*, *The Bicycle Thief*, and *Shoe Shine*.”<sup>48</sup> Significantly, though, much of the mainstream US media tended to dismiss the film as Soviet propaganda or avoided covering it altogether. The *Trail Daily Times* mysteriously failed to post any comment. Other North American papers dismissively labeled *Salt* red, but British and European mainstream papers were keen to review the film and they were often positive. *The London Sunday Dispatch*, for example, said it “touches greatness.” *The Glasgow Herald* said it “roars against the brutalities of Big Business.”<sup>49</sup> The Paris media were equally enthused. *L’Aurore* called it “a classic” and *Paris-Soir* said “Zola would have loved it.”<sup>50</sup> In Mexico, too, reviews praised *Salt*. *El Universal* said it had “a tremendous impact.” *El Nacional*, the government-run newspaper, praised the film for creating a “sense of solidarity.”<sup>51</sup>

Why the easier acceptance of *Salt* outside the US and Canada? When the House Committee on UnAmerican Activities (HUAC) blacklisted the “Hollywood Ten” in 1947, some of them sought refuge in Mexico where no passport was required at that time and where the Red Scare had not fully tightened its grip on Mexican society. They were more welcome there, according to Caute, and some were able to start successful businesses despite the red stain HUAC left on their careers.<sup>52</sup> London became a haven for other blacklisted moviemakers and they continued to create box-office successes. Joseph Losey was a leading example. Edward Dmytryk was another, although he would later return to the US to testify against his left-wing colleagues. Two of the people he named, screenwriters Norma and Ben Barzman, moved to Paris, another safe haven for Hollywood outcasts who were welcomed to the land of the *nouvelle vague* film movement of the late 1950s that spawned socially conscious directors like Francois Truffaut, Jean-Luc Goddard, and Eric Rohmer.

47. Herbert Biberman, *Salt of the Earth: The Story of a Film* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1965), 184.

48. Biberman, *Salt Story*, 184, provides the longer text of the CBC review from which this quotation is drawn. Also see Solski and Smaller, *Mine Mill*, 117.

49. “London papers like ‘Salt of the Earth,’” *Union*, 17 January 1955.

50. Biberman, *Salt Story*, 192.

51. “‘Salt’ in Mexico, gets rave reviews,” *Union*, 25 October 1954.

52. Caute, *Great Fear*, 212.



**Today, the Trail smelter employs about 1,200 workers and is owned by the multinational Teck Resources Ltd.**

Courtesy of photographer Leola Jewett-Verzuh.

As film historian David Spaner noted, Europe had become home to “the first American exile colony.”<sup>53</sup>

Although the New York premiere was a victory for the filmmakers, it did little to bolster the beleaguered *Salt*'s fight for survival. In fact, it had just begun. In Trail, the Torres visit had spurred Local 480 leaders to embrace the idea of showing *Salt*, but to do so they would face the power of McCarthyism head on. They would also be competing with a plethora of other cultural events Trailites were enjoying throughout 1954. Jazz great Duke Ellington, long suspected by the FBI of having Communist sympathies, visited the smelter city and entertained a thousand local music lovers with “Just Squeeze Me (But Please Don't Tease Me)” and other hits.<sup>54</sup> Audie Murphy, also suspected of left-leaning views for speaking out against HUAC,<sup>55</sup> was blazing across the Wild West at the Odeon (now the Royal), and *High Noon*, a “left-wing Western,” thrilled

53. Spaner, *Shoot It!*, 56. For a full account of the Hollywood left from the 1930s onward, see Buhle and Wagner's *Radical Hollywood* cited elsewhere.

54. Karl Evanzz, *The Messenger: The Rise and Fall of Elijah Muhammad* (New York: Knopf Doubleday, 2011), 224–225, describes the FBI claims about Ellington.

55. David Smith, *The Price of Valor: The Life of Audie Murphy, America's Most Decorated Hero of World War II* (Washington: Regnery Publishing, 2015) discusses Murphy's views on Communism in Chapter 8 – “A Hero Goes to Hollywood.”

outdoor audiences at nearby Castlegar's Elk Drive-in.<sup>56</sup> Enchanted local churchgoers heard the anti-Communist radio broadcasts of American evangelist Billy Graham.<sup>57</sup>

Skimming the pages of the *Trail Daily Times* in 1954, it seemed like business as usual in the smelter city, but for Local 480 and other trade unions the year threatened to be "one of the toughest yet."<sup>58</sup> Still, it ratified its collective agreement with Cominco that June, freeing up time that summer for the union and Local 131 of the Mine-Mill Ladies Auxiliary to support the striking Bluebell miners at Riondel, BC.<sup>59</sup> Meantime, the summer months also brought an increasingly virulent attack by the McCarthyites aimed at stopping *Salt* from being shown in North American theatres. The *Commentator* summarized the film's struggle to find cinemas that would show it and urged members to write to politicians asking them to help get the film into Canadian theatres. "The fight is still on to bring [the film] before the Canadian people, for the first time," the union paper noted, but "Big Business opened up its guns on this story, even as it started to be filmed, in a brazen attempt to smash and sabotage its production."<sup>60</sup>

In September, Toronto unions continued to promote *Salt* at the largest Labour Day parade in the city's history. More than seventy unions participated, with Frigidaire Local 303 of the United Automobile Workers using its float to point out that "this was the most exciting motion picture union workers ever made." The float, headed by a Canadian Legion band, "emphasized the entertainment value of the picture with its humor, human emotions, love and tenderness." Praise from several union papers was listed on the float. "Ranks with Grapes of Wrath," crowed the *Bindery News*. "A great film," noted *Ford Facts*. "A motion picture of, by and for workers," opined the *Hotel and Club Voice*.<sup>61</sup> Nevertheless, the assault on *Salt* continued and Mine-Mill's Murphy

56. Probably unknown to most Trail viewers, they were watching what has been described as screenwriter Carl Foreman's "left-wing Western," Buhle and Wagner, 416. The historians further contend that the town featured in *High Noon* was redolent of the town where *Salt* was filmed, 421.

57. Eric R. Crouse, "Responding to the Reds: Conservative Protestants, Anti-Communism, and the Shaping of American Culture, 1945–1965," *Historical Papers: Canadian Society of Church History* (2002): 97–109.

58. "Eleventh Convention, Industrious, Earnest, Accomplishes Good Job," *BC District Union News*, 29 January 1954. The convention also passed emergency resolutions declaring the metal mining industry in crisis, called for public works programs to address increasing unemployment, and proposed that immigrant workers "should be made eligible for Unemployment Insurance."

59. "President's Corner," "Bluebell Strike Solid," and "Ladies Auxiliary," *Commentator*, June 1954.

60. "When Is It Coming?" *Commentator*, June 1954.

61. "UAW float, Legion band hail picture" *Union*, 27 September 1954.

railed against those who tried to stop the film from being shown, describing *Salt* as “a film of real people, with wonderful acting, and a factual story.” Despite the view of many theatre managers that *Salt* was a good movie and had wide public appeal, Murphy said, the big theatre chains are “sabotaging it and denying to the movie goers the opportunity.” He added that,

So tight is the control, and so great is the fear among movie managers that they are even willing to forego making money. They are afraid that if they show it the Hollywood moguls will put them on the blacklist. But this picture will be shown because ways will be found.<sup>62</sup>

Murphy’s *BC District Union News* also published testimonials about the film, including one from Ernest Winch, the outspoken leader of the BC wing of the CCF (later the New Democratic Party). According to historian Benjamin Isitt, Winch, a member of the provincial legislative assembly for Burnaby, and his son Harold “viewed themselves as standing to the left of the Communist Party” posing as “guardians of BC Marxism.”<sup>63</sup> The elder Winch declared that *Salt* was “an excellent film, and faithful in the slightest respect to life.” When asked about the charge that the film was propaganda, he laughed and said:

Anything is propaganda to the bosses when they are revealed in all their nakedness, and this film doesn’t exaggerate their tactics in the least. They are and have always been much more ruthless than they are shown in the film.<sup>64</sup>

But such testimonials did not diminish the barriers that had been erected and forcefully maintained by anti-*Salt* politicians like Republican Congressman Donald L. Jackson of California. In 1953, he told Congress that the film was an attempt to undermine US efforts in the Korean War, and he pledged to “do everything in [his] power to prevent the showing of this Communist made film.”<sup>65</sup> Indeed, from the moment *Salt* was conceived by director Biberman and producer Paul Jarrico, both blacklisted Hollywood Ten members, the film was in trouble, and the trouble only deepened when screenwriter Michael Wilson, Jarrico’s brother-in-law and an Oscar winner, joined them.<sup>66</sup>

Some in the Hollywood motion picture business had been politicized in their youth, schooled by immigrant parents who had joined the Communist party

62. “Around The District Union,” *BC District Union News*, September 1954.

63. Benjamin Isitt, *Militant Minority: British Columbia Workers and the Rise of the New Left, 1948–1972* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2011). See also, Dorothy G. Steeves, *The Compassionate Rebel: Ernest Winch and the Growth of Socialism in Western Canada* (Vancouver: J.J. Douglas/Boag Foundation, 1960).

64. “Veteran MLA Praises ‘Salt of the Earth,’” *BC District Union News*, September 1954.

65. Lorence, *Suppression*, 82, quoting the *Congressional Record*, 83rd Congress, 1st Session, 24 February 1953, Vol. 99, pt. 1, 1371–72.

66. Wilson won the Oscar for *A Place in the Sun*, the 1951 film adaptation of American novelist Theodore Dreiser’s *An American Tragedy*. He went on to write two more Oscar winners, *The Bridge on the River Kwai* (1957) and *Lawrence of Arabia* (1963). He was blacklisted after HUAC declared him an “unfriendly witness.”



in the 1930s, and encouraged to become members of the Young Communist League. Many Hollywood directors, producers, screenwriters, and technical staff had learned where they stood politically during the 1930s with the creation of the Popular Front, a broad coalition of social activists. Historian Michael Denning describes it as a cultural front marked by the “increased influence on the participation of working-class Americans in the world of culture and the arts.”<sup>67</sup> As the Great Depression deepened several Hollywood workers saw Communism as offering an antidote to the misery of the Dirty Thirties. Biberman, for example, joined the party. So did Jarrico and Wilson. At the same time, they were active in Hollywood unions as those organizations gained strength in the late 1930s and challenged the work rules at the big studios. Unionization eventually led to the historic cartoonists’ strike at Disney Studios in 1941 and the set decorators strike at Warner Brothers in 1945, the start of which has been called “Hollywood Black Friday.”<sup>68</sup> The strike threats and internecine union battles in Los Angeles fueled an investigation by Democratic Representative Martin Dies of Texas who set his committee the task of routing out Communists in the Hollywood unions. From 1938 to 1944, the Dies committee served as a precursor to HUAC, sending a clear signal to Biberman, Jarrico, Wilson, and others that anyone with radical views would eventually be targeted for investigation.

While Dies might have later seemed a comparatively quiet prelude to McCarthy, it heightened concerns among Hollywood reds who were anxious to make films that offered a more truthful version of American life, one that countered the saccharine images of perfect harmony painted by Norman Rockwell and portrayed in happy musicals and romantic comedies. When they were blacklisted in 1947, the Hollywood Ten and others turned their talents to the task of creating that kind of movie. *Salt* became the prime example of how a progressive film was supposed to look. Not only was its content progressive and written in cooperation with its main subjects, but the way the film was produced also set the stage for a different, more egalitarian, more sharing process that defied the top-down studio system. Billed as “an honest movie about American working people,” *Salt* recounted the real life story of striking Mexican-American mine workers, members of Torres’s Local 890. It also highlighted the powerful role of women in winning the strike.<sup>69</sup>

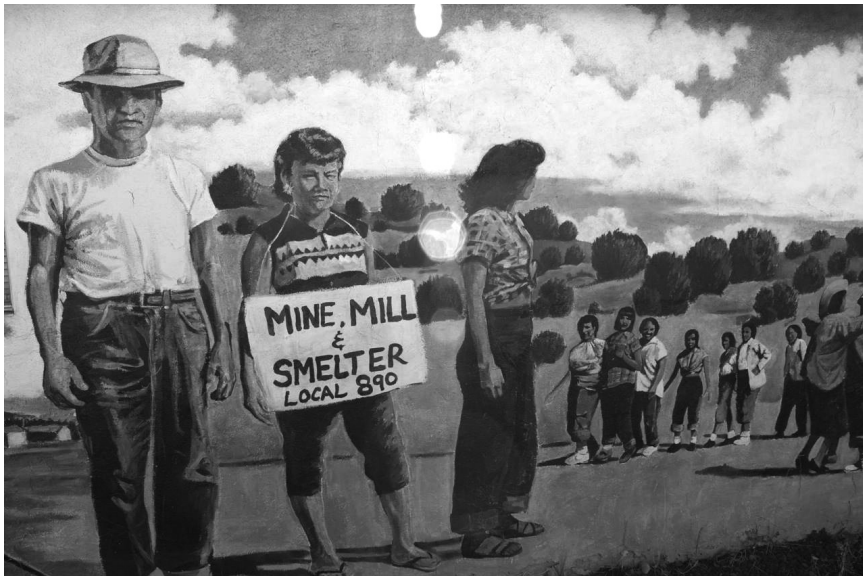
For historian Carl Weinberg, the film’s main themes are carefully constructed and can be analyzed through the lens of three distinct scenes. The first is the moment of crisis when the local judge brings down what the filmmakers

67. Michael Denning, *The Cultural Front: The Laboring of American Culture in the Twentieth Century* (New York: Verso, 1997), xvii.

68. For a full review of the early history of unionism in Hollywood, see Mike Nielsen and Gene Mailes, *Hollywood’s Other Blacklist* (London: British Film Institute, 1995).

69. Promotional brochure circulated before the film’s New York premiere at the Grande Theater in Manhattan.





One of several visual memories of the Salt of the Earth strike is the mural painted on the Local 890 hall. In late 2014, the local under a new number voted to decertify. Courtesy of United Steel Workers.

called the “Taft-Hartley injunction,” stopping the men from picketing. Ladies’ Auxiliary Local 209 proposes that the women hold the line, a vote is taken, and all agree to the proposal. It signals a major turning point in the strike and offers a glimpse at the political motivations of the filmmakers and their sponsoring union. Mine-Mill had fought the Taft-Hartley law and eventually suffered the consequences of it with expulsion from the CIO and the harassment of its leaders in the courts for years afterwards. As Weinberg notes, the law served as a stand-in for “the whole range of Cold War-influenced legislation that restricted the activities of Mine-Mill and its members.”<sup>70</sup> Although Taft-Hartley had no jurisdiction in Canada, Local 480’s reds were outspoken defenders of their union and its right to hold radical political views often voicing their defiance in the *Commentator*.

The second pivotal scene depicts women on the picket line and their arrest by the local sheriff played in the film by Will Geer latterly of television’s *The Waltons*. What is shown in the film is a mild version of the many actions taken by women to support the strike. Weinberg: “Not only did women push cars, drag men out of them, and maintain their lines; they also jumped on

70. Carl R. Weinberg, “Salt of the Earth: Labor, Film, and the Cold War,” special online feature, *Organization of American Historians Magazine of History*, October 2010, <http://magazine.oah.org/issues/244/salt.html>.

cars, threw rocks at strikebreakers, and deployed various ‘domestic’ items as weapons: knitting needles, pins, (rotten) eggs and chili peppers.”<sup>71</sup> It was a theme that showed a militant feminist group acting out their convictions as politically aware women who knew well what was at stake in the strike. At a time when many Mine-Mill men would have been uncomfortable with the leading role played by females, the filmmakers chose to highlight it thus giving film-goers a larger perception of women as more than supporters of the male-dominated union. Members of Ladies Auxiliary Local 131 in Trail would have had no problem relating to the dynamic that unfolded under this theme and would have lauded the independent stance taken by the auxiliary, a union organization that has often been seen incorrectly as an apolitical knitting circle or food supplier at local union events.

Weinberg’s final scene shows men hanging laundry. He calls it “the most striking in the whole film.” The image would serve Second Wave feminists of the 1960s well and the issues it underscored – “job discrimination, the politics of housework, and the sexual double standard – would provide ammunition for a new challenge to the male breadwinner tradition.”<sup>72</sup> As historian Wendy Cuthbertson has argued, CIO unions like Mine-Mill were “left with a predominantly male membership, which expected unions to represent their best interests – interests that did not include women’s equality.”<sup>73</sup> In Trail, women had fought the war by producing war materials in the filth and heat of the smelter. When the war ended, Local 480 agreed with the company that the women should be laid off to make room for returning servicemen. Ladies Auxiliary 131 members, led by Communist Tillie Belanger and others, objected to the economic and social setback but they were still prepared to offer the same kind of support to the union as that shown by women in *Salt*.<sup>74</sup>

Ellen Baker adds a fourth key scene to Weinberg’s list. Focusing on the feminist and community-support aspects of *Salt*, she discusses what may be the most moving scene in the film. The female lead actor confronts her strike-leader husband in the kitchen of their company-supplied home. He is about to slap her across the face, but she stops him saying, “That would be the old way.”<sup>75</sup> Thus, *Salt* reveals “a fundamental transformation taking place in the relations of husbands to wives, a transformation made possible by a change of

71. Weinberg, “Salt,” *OAH Magazine*.

72. Weinberg, “Salt,” *OAH Magazine*.

73. Wendy Cuthbertson, *Labour Goes to War: The CIO and the Construction of a New Social Order, 1939–45* (Vancouver: UBC Press, 2012), 143–144.

74. Belanger and others spoke out in support of Mine-Mill on local radio and in letters to the editor. “Calls Raiders ‘Vultures,’” *Union*, 24 April 1950, is one example. Belanger was supported by Local 480 in her failed run in the 1953 federal election as a Communist party candidate. See “LLP Has 21 Women Candidates,” *Pacific Tribune*, 24 July 1953.

75. *Salt of the Earth*, directed by Herbert Biberman (Los Angeles, 1954), DVD, US Library of Congress.





Sixty years after the first showing of the blacklisted movie in defiance of McCarthyism, Kootenay residents got a new opportunity to view the film in the same theatre.

Courtesy of Ron Verzuh.

Perhaps it represented wishful thinking about what might have been had McCarthyism not intervened. Yet here was an example of how filmmakers could exercise the principles of co-operation, collaboration and communalism to create a film that would stand as an artifact of what could be done if film-makers were allowed to express their political vision in their work. Making *Salt* was a learning process for everyone involved. Filmmakers brought their professional approach; they knew from past experience how the job must be done. Local trade unionists and the women brought their ideas of how the truth would be told. There were intra-class debates, gender differences, and lay-versus-professional disagreements, but out of that crucible came *Salt*. Added to the mix was the violent opposition that came from all quarters. As

such, it became “the one unfettered creation of Hollywood’s victims,” according to Buhle and Wagner.<sup>78</sup>

As Torres told the Local 480 members in Trail, to accomplish their task the filmmakers and their novice cast encountered hoodlum violence, vigilante actions and even the US government’s refusal to allow *Salt* star Rosaura Revueltes to reenter the US to complete filming after visiting her home in Mexico.<sup>79</sup> In addition, the filmmakers also found their movie barred from most American theatres, thanks to Roy Brewer, the anti-Communist representative of the International Alliance of Theatrical Stage Employees and Moving Picture Operators (IATSE), and other members of the Motion Picture Alliance for the Preservation of American Ideals (MPAAI). As Biberman explains in his book *Salt of the Earth*, when he was searching for theatres that would risk showing *Salt*, Brewer did more than anyone else to prevent it from being seen, threatening union projectionists with expulsion if they ran it. As the director recalled,

Despite the fact that he was a lowly international labor representative in a community which worshipped status, he was able to say to Simon Lazarus [representing Biberman’s Independent Productions Corporation], with all the authority of a monarch, that if he proceeded with such persons [Hollywood Ten members], he would be destroyed.<sup>80</sup>

In Chicago, a boycott led by a “conspiracy” of movie distributors, IATSE’s Brewer and the American Legion, had stopped showings at two theatres where a thousand people were turned away at the door.<sup>81</sup> A court case later found for the *Salt* producers.<sup>82</sup> The boycott and other attempts to stop *Salt* incensed Mine-Mill’s international office in Denver, Colorado. It had agreed to sponsor the film partly to support Torres’s local but also to back the making of a film that would depict what happens when a union does not back away from an exploitative employer. Many of the Empire Zinc workers had appeared on camera as had Clinton Jencks and his spouse Virginia. During filming, they and others had faced taunts, death threats and sometimes the fists and rifles of anti-*Salt* thugs. Jencks, who had originally told Biberman about the strike as a potential film subject, would eventually go to jail on a perjury conviction. He, like Maurice Travis, the international union’s patch-eyed secretary-treasurer, and the others, would face years of official harassment for holding supposedly anti-American beliefs; in short, for being Communists.

Mine-Mill’s Denver office was noticeably upset with the intensity of the Red Scare tactics being used against *Salt*, and President John Clark angrily stated his concerns. The film “makes you gulp and wipe your eyes,” he said. It “gives

78. Buhle and Wagner, *Radical Hollywood*, xv.

79. “Movie completed despite violence by company finks,” *Union*, 9 March 1953.

80. Biberman, *Salt Story*, 49.

81. “‘Salt of the Earth’ to open in Toronto,” *Union*, 1 August 1954.

82. “‘Salt of the Earth’ wins court fight,” *Union*, 20 June 1955.



you a feeling of pride that your own people, and not glamorous mock-heroes of Hollywood, are the actors and actresses in this drama of wage earners and their love of their union.” He then asked “why do they denounce this picture, a story that upholds human dignity and the fight against injustice, while all around them are movies that degrade and demoralize our younger generation?”<sup>83</sup> Travis, announcing that “not one thin dime of our Union’s money is being used to make the production,” stated that Mine-Mill sponsored *Salt* because “we think it is about time the American people got an opportunity to see something besides Hopalong Cassidy and technicolor musicals.” He argued strenuously that “the reason for this whole attack on the picture is that companies don’t want the world to know that their foremen and deputies do take out their sadistic hatred on the men, women and kids, mostly of Mexican-American origin, who fight for their bread and butter.”<sup>84</sup> Such high-minded reasoning aside, the union was under siege from the legions of cold warriors. Thus the film also served as another device with which to mount a fight-back campaign outside the courts where various Mine-Mill leaders, including Travis, would find themselves throughout the McCarthy era.

Cold War historian Ellen Schrecker has observed, “how powerful the anti-communist crusade was and how strongly it was committed to suppressing unorthodox views.”<sup>85</sup> The irony, she added, was obvious. Here was a film about unions, starring union members, and sponsored by a union, but the IATSE leaders ensured that it would have to be shown by non-union projectionists or not at all.<sup>86</sup> Several film critics of the day would have agreed with her. In fact, many reviewers slammed the anti-*Salt* opposition. “It is good social commentary and good movie-making. And it is NOT Communist propaganda,” wrote the *Colorado Labor Advocate*, the official organ of the Colorado Federation of Labor.<sup>87</sup> There were allegations about the film’s Communist connections, but *The New Mexican*, a Santa Fe daily, opined that “the film appears no more subversive than ‘documentary’ movies put out by corporations which seek to glorify their product or ‘sell’ the corporations’ economic or social point of view.”<sup>88</sup> Other reviewers also declared that the charge of “Communist” was “sheer nonsense.”<sup>89</sup> *Reynolds News* in London observed that “Maybe the people who made it are Communists; if so, it is a pity that they’re the only people left in America with the guts to come out into the open in this way and fight the

83. John Clark, “The President’s Corner: I tasted ‘Salt of the Earth,’” *Union*, 4 January 1954.

84. “Travis debunks stories on movie,” *Union*, 9 March 1953.

85. Schrecker, *Many Are The Crimes*, 331.

86. Schrecker, *Many Are The Crimes*, 334.

87. “‘A good movie’ – AFL paper,” *Union*, 12 April 1954.

88. “Sanity vs. hysteria,” *The Union*, 31 August 1953. Reprint of an editorial in *The New Mexican*, Santa Fe, NM, 6 August 1953.

89. *Union*, 29 March 1954.



American brand of fascism; how feeble by comparison seem, the occasional bleats of the American ‘liberals.’”<sup>90</sup> *El Nacional* in Mexico was perhaps strongest on the issue of Communism:

There is no reason to consider this movie of communistic tendency. To ask for equal treatment for North Americans of different nationalities is not a communist idea but simply to demand the accomplishment of a right recognized in the Constitution of the United States; the contrary, would be equal to considering the proceedings of Washington and Lincoln as communistic, a nonsense that could not occur to a sensible person.<sup>91</sup>

*Salt* screenwriter Wilson explained the tenacious nature of the “nonsense” at Mine-Mill’s international convention in Louisville, Kentucky, the previous October, arguing that the film was “violently attacked by anti-labor forces” because it was the “first feature film ever made in this country that dealt honestly with the life of a democratic trade union. Horror of horrors! ... a picture that told the story from the viewpoint of the working man himself.” Worse, added Wilson, was that it was “the first picture in this country to face the facts of life about discrimination against the Mexican-American people of the Southwest.”<sup>92</sup> Many of the delegates to a Mine-Mill wage and policy convention in Denver shared Wilson’s views. When they viewed the film, wives and daughters wept openly as did some mine and smelter workers, *Union* reported. “Not that the story is sad. On the contrary, people cry with sheer emotion as they see their union sisters and brothers winning their struggles.”<sup>93</sup>

On that same note, after seeing *Salt* at the Louisville convention, George B. Casey, a guest delegate from Rossland, BC, stood up to say that the union had taken its “greatest forward stride” by fighting to abolish race discrimination. The veteran trade unionist added that it was “a class conscious movie that will be a dividend payer wherever practiced.” Casey was a founding member of Local 38 of the Western Federation of Miners (predecessor of Mine-Mill) representing Rossland miners.<sup>94</sup> Trail Mine-Mill leaders were of that same ilk, contending with the anti-red problem as best they could, but the forces against showing the film were evident even in the little smelter city buried in the mountains just north of the Canada-US border. “Because of anti-red hysteria,” wrote Al King in his memoir *Red Bait!*, “a lot of people didn’t want a pro-union movie ... to be made.”<sup>95</sup>

Given such widespread opposition, it seemed increasingly unlikely that Local 480 would succeed with its plan. Then came a break. After months

90. *Union*, 17 January 1955.

91. *Union*, 25 October 1954.

92. Michael Wilson, “Salt of the Earth,” *Union*, 12 October 1953. Comments from the 1953 Louisville convention speech by the *Salt* scriptwriter.

93. “Delegates see ‘Salt of the Earth,’” *Union*, 12 April 1954.

94. George B. Casey, “The Open Forum: Thanks from an old-timer,” *Union*, 12 October 1953.

95. Al King, *Red Bait!*, 66–67.



The historic Rossland Miners' Union Hall, built in the 1890s, was the venue for many Mine-Mill conferences and other events including the founding conference of the autonomous Canadian Mine-Mill in 1955, the year after the initial *Salt* showing. Courtesy of the Trail Historical Society.

of informing members of the international union's fight to show *Salt*, the November edition of the *District News* announced that the "celluloid curtain" had finally risen allowing *Salt* to be shown in the Kootenays.<sup>96</sup> In September, the local believed it had secured one of the Trail theatres but it was mistaken. The Strand and Odeon theatre managers at first seemed willing to show the film, but the "top brass put their foot down." The *Commentator* opined that "we as free Canadians (?) are not to be exposed to a film that portrays the life and love story of a Mexican-American miner and his wife by the veto of these high movie magnates."<sup>97</sup> The union's leaders were not to be foiled in their attempts to defy McCarthyism. If the Trail cinema owners were joining the blacklist crusade, they would search elsewhere.

In the November *Commentator* they announced that they had hired the movie theatre in nearby Castlegar, a village where many smelter workers had co-operatively helped each other built their homes.<sup>98</sup> In its next edition, the

96. "Around The District Union," *BC District Union News*, November 1954.

97. "Salt of the Earth," *Commentator*, November 1954.

98. "'Salt of the Earth' Showing at the Castle Theatre," *Commentator*, November 1954.

**LOCAL 480 Mine-Mill**  
— PRESENTS —  
**FIRST SHOWING IN THE KOOTENAYS**  
*Castle Theatre—Castlegar*

**NEW YORK TIMES**  
(Bostley Crowther)  
March 15, 1954

"... a rugged and starkly poignant story of a Mexican-American miner and his wife... a strong pro-labor film... Michael Wilson's tautly muscled script develops considerable personal drama, raw emotion and power... It is a conflict that broadly embraces the love of struggling parents for their young, the dignity of some of these poor people and their longings to see their children's lot improved."

**"SALT  
of the  
EARTH"**

**Show Times**

December 15  
11 a.m. 7 p.m. 9 p.m.

December 16  
7 p.m. 9 p.m.

**Price — 75c**

**TICKETS AVAILABLE FROM**  
UNION OFFICE — TRAIL  
RIGBY'S COFFEE SHOP — CASTLEGAR  
EXECUTIVE AND SHOP STEWARDS OF LOCAL 480

REFUND OF 40c WILL BE  
MADE ON CHILDREN'S  
TICKETS AT THE DOOR

Once Local 480 had secured the Castle Theatre as the venue for showing *Salt*, it purchased advertising space on the movies page of the *Trail Daily Times* as well as publishing this half-page ad in the *Commentator* (1 December 1954).

union paper advertised five screenings over two days, December 15 and 16, with tickets costing seventy-five cents (children's tickets cost thirty cents). Local 480 also purchased display advertising in the *Trail Daily Times* where an announcement appeared on the editorial page along with the other movie ads.<sup>99</sup> The *Commentator* ad reprinted a positive review from *The New York Times*, noting that *Salt* was a "rugged and starkly poignant story" using Wilson's "tautly muscled script." Film critic Bosley Crowther further commented that *Salt* depicts a "conflict that broadly embraces the love of struggling parents for their young."<sup>100</sup> It hardly sounded like the evil red menace that many other North American newspapers had described. Despite the anti-Communist press and attempts to suppress the film across the continent, local moviegoers appeared anxious to see the film. Smelter poet E.M. Nobes, quoted earlier, joined about 900 other local residents who viewed the film, many of them travelling the 40 kilometres of gravel road from the larger centres of Trail and Rossland to see it.<sup>101</sup> Like others in the audience, Nobes was deeply touched when he wrote:

99. "Salt of the Earth," (advertisement), *TDT*, 13 December 1954.

100. *Commentator*, December 1954.

101. "Castlegar movie packed for 'Salt of the Earth,'" *Union*, 3 January 1955. For more on

It made me feel with each new reel  
 Unprecedented pride  
 To know Mine, Mill has brought this thrill,  
 To warm your heart inside.<sup>102</sup>

In spite of good notices, though, the film and its sponsoring international union were victims of repeated salvos from cold warriors like Congressman Jackson, future American president Ronald Reagan, a leader of the Screen Actor's Guild, leaders of the Motion Picture Alliance of America, IATSE's Brewer, and HUAC "friendly witnesses" that had named names at public hearings in Washington, D.C. Joining forces with them was right-wing New York-based labour columnist Victor Riesel who worked closely with Brewer, FBI Director J. Edgar Hoover, and others to ensure that *Salt* stayed blacklisted.<sup>103</sup> In his widely distributed column – it was syndicated to 350 newspapers – Riesel delivered a "blistering attack" on the film, focusing on "the alleged threat of atomic spying, danger to the nation's vital zinc concentrate plants [such as Empire Zinc's properties in New Mexico], and potential danger to the Korean War effort."<sup>104</sup> In addition to these anti-Communist roadblocks, former colleagues of the Hollywood Ten were giving HUAC the names of anyone they thought might be a Communist. Famed director Elia Kazan was among the friendly witnesses at the HUAC hearings in 1952, ending the film careers of many Hollywood actors, writers and directors.<sup>105</sup> As mentioned-earlier, Edward Dmytryk, the Grand Forks, BC-born director whose 1948 film *Crossfire* critiqued anti-Semitism, also turned on his Hollywood colleagues.<sup>106</sup>

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Nobes, see Ron Verzuh, "The Smelter Poets: The Inspiring Role of Worker Poetry in a BC Labour Newspaper During the 'Age of the CIO,'" *BC Studies* 177 (Spring 2013): 85–126.

102. "Salt of the Earth" *Commentator*, September 1954.

103. Aaron Leonard, "The Bureau and the Journalist: Victor Riesel's Secret Relationship With the FBI," *Truthout*, 14 February 2014, briefly outlines Riesel's long career as an FBI collaborator who in 1956 is blinded by an acid attacker apparently seeking revenge for Riesel's reporting on mob connections to a Long Island union. <http://truth-out.org/news/item/14545-the-bureau-and-the-journalist-victor-riesels-secret-relationship-with-the-fbi>

104. Lorence, *Suppression*, 78. Note that the Trail smelter had long been a producer of high-grade zinc.

105. Interestingly, Kazan's *On the Waterfront*, starring Marlon Brando as the dupe of a corrupt union boss, had been released in July 1954 and would later win eight Academy Awards. In it, Kazan glorifies the Brando character who testifies against his friends and fellow union members. Kazan beat out Dmytryk for the Oscar in 1947 for *Gentlemen's Agreement*, another film about anti-Semitism.

106. See Victor Navasky, *Naming Names* (New York: Viking, 1980). For specific details on the Dmytryk betrayal, see Larry Ceplair and Steven Englund, *The Inquisition in Hollywood: Politics in the Film Community 1930–1960* (Garden City, N.Y.: Anchor Press/Doubleday, 1980). See also, Richard English, "What Makes a Hollywood Communist?" *Saturday Evening Post*, 19 May 1951; and, Ron Verzuh, "Hollywood Turncoat," *Boundary History* 16, 2014, 79–83.

Thus it was that *Salt* was doomed to remain largely unseen. In spite of Local 480's daring showing of the blacklisted film, along with similar efforts by Mine-Mill Local 598 in Sudbury, Ontario, and other Canadian Mine-Mill strongholds,<sup>107</sup> by the end of 1954, the *Salt* controversy had done nothing to lessen the determination of anti-Communist Canadian politicians. Ontario premier George Drew, later to lead the federal Progressive Conservative party, and Québec Premier Maurice Duplessis, whose regressive Padlock Law had been used to jail Communists and other dissenters, took an even harder stand against "communist-dominated unions."<sup>108</sup> Historian Reg Whitaker called Drew one of the "would-be McCarthys" because he threatened to make communism "a divisive and destructive partisan issue," something the Canadian government preferred to carefully control.<sup>109</sup> As one historian notes, with his "Operation Panic" Duplessis had been using the powers of the state since 1937 to "seek out and destroy nascent Communist organizations."<sup>110</sup> In 1954, he had only intensified his anti-communist crusade. Meanwhile, in December 1954 McCarthy was censured by the US Senate "for contempt and abuse" of Senate and House committees. However, as Senator Herbert Lehman of New York, stated, "We have condemned the individual, but we have not yet repudiated the 'ism.'"<sup>111</sup> Tailgunner Joe, as McCarthy was nicknamed, was clearly on his way out of favour,<sup>112</sup> but the attacks on *Salt* and Mine-Mill would not abate for years to come as the full impact of the Communist Control Act of 1954, introduced by Senator Hubert H. Humphrey, outlawed the Communist party.

At the beginning of 1955, Murphy was still railing against theatres that refused to screen the film. He charged that Cominco had stopped a showing in the northern BC mining community of Tulsequah, arguing that the company was exercising its "old prerogative" in prohibiting employees from seeing *Salt*. He accused the company of returning to the "censoring business again."<sup>113</sup> On

107. Solski and Smaller, *Mine-Mill*, 117, who note that "*Salt*, although refused screening in Canada by the US-controlled Projectionists Union and refused distribution by the commercial companies, did get released through persistent efforts of Mine Mill locals and film societies throughout the country." Also included is a photograph of filmgoers lined up outside a movie theatre in Sudbury, Ontario, under a marquee that read "You Can See It – Salt of the Earth."

108. "Duplessis Defends Quebec Labor Bill," *TDT*, 1 December 1954.

109. Reg Whitaker, "'We Know They're There': Canada and Its Others, with or without the Cold War" in Richard Cavell, ed., *Love, Hate, and Fear in Canada's Cold War* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2004), 39.

110. Michael D. Behiels, *Prelude to Québec's Quiet Revolution: Liberalism vs Neo-Nationalism, 1945-60* (Montréal-Kingston: McGill-Queen's Press, 1985), 228.

111. Robert M. Lichtman, *The Supreme Court and McCarthy-era Repression: One Hundred Decisions* (Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 2012), 76.

112. "McCarthy Censured On 2 Counts; 1 Out," *TDT*, 3 December 1954. See also, James Giblin, *The Rise and Fall of Senator Joe McCarthy* (New York: Houghton Mifflin Harcourt, 2009), 256.

113. "Around The District Union," *BC District Union News*, February 1955.

18 May 1955, the pugnacious Mine-Mill director tried to resurrect the *Salt* wars by republishing a positive review that had appeared in the *Vancouver Sun*. Writer Jack Kirkwood told readers, many of whom would not be able to see the movie, that it was “told fearlessly and beautifully to make one of the most enjoyable and unforgettable movie experiences in recent years.” He then recapped the checkered history behind the film and explained that projectionists in some cities had been forbidden to play “a movie that boasts realism and technical effects of an almost flawless nature.”<sup>114</sup>

In the end, it was a lost cause for Murphy and the film’s Local 480 boosters, for *Salt* was never widely distributed. In mid-July 1955, a hundred delegates from around the country met in the historic Rossland Miners’ Union Hall, a few kilometres from Trail to form the long-desired autonomous Canadian Mine-Mill organization at the seventh Canadian Mine-Mill convention. Among the resolutions adopted was one encouraging locals to purchase ten copies of *False Witness*, the telling confession of Harvey Matusow, the FBI informant who had put Clinton Jencks and many others behind bars.<sup>115</sup> Another resolution urged them to “endeavour to further the distribution of the Mine, Mill film ‘Salt of the Earth.’”<sup>116</sup>

Local 480 had fought hard to show *Salt*. As Bill King, a former labour minister in the BC government recalled, his brother Al King and the other Communist unionists “were very much upfront about resisting McCarthyism. They didn’t shrink away from their beliefs and their radicalism at all.”<sup>117</sup> Kootenay historian Duff Sutherland added:

Part of the reason they wanted to show the film was that they wanted to demonstrate solidarity.... But also, I think that they wanted to, you know, just push back against the kind of harassment and discrimination that they were experiencing in Canada. They experienced a lot in Canada as the leaders of a trade union in Trail and being perceived as radicals.<sup>118</sup>

Other trade union locals also tried to show the film as a statement of solidarity, but according to *Salt* historian Lorence, by the end of 1954 the blacklisted film had “run commercially at exactly thirteen theatres in the United States.”<sup>119</sup> For him *Salt* was

114. “He Likes ‘Salt,’” *BC District Union News*, May 1955.

115. Schrecker, *Many Are The Crimes*, chronicles Harvey Matusow’s career as an informant, noting that even his *False Witness* did not sway an El Paso, Texas, judge to exonerate Jencks. He believed that “Matusow’s about-face was part of a communist plot.”

116. “Union Leader School Urged By Convention,” *TDT*, 20 July 1955.

117. Bill King, videotaped interview by Ron Verzuh, Castlegar, BC, 19 November 2014.

118. Duff Sutherland, videotaped interview by Ron Verzuh, Castlegar, BC, 19 November 2014.

119. Lorence, *Suppression*, 168. “‘Salt of the Earth’ to open in Toronto,” *Union*, 1 August 1954, says it played in two New York theatres, in Silver City, NM, San Francisco, Berkeley, Crockett, Monterey and La Hobra, CA, and Arvada, CO. It also had a ten-week run at the Marcal Theatre in Los Angeles. Showings in Toronto, Vancouver and Sudbury bring the total to the thirteen



a record that chronicles a determined effort by socially committed men and women to question the accepted gender and racial relations of their time and to build better lives for themselves and their families through the medium of socially conscious unionism.<sup>120</sup>

Yet few would get the opportunity to form their own opinions about it for *Salt* could not withstand the pressures of the Cold War.



SIXTY YEARS HAVE PASSED since the McCarthyites laid siege to *Salt*. Today the once blacklisted movie survives and continues to be shown on campuses, at union conferences, film festivals, and educational events. It also continues to serve as an inspiration to a new generation of activists and filmmakers. Documentaries continue to be made about *Salt* and YouTube postings flourish regarding the Hollywood Ten. In 2001, left-wing filmmaker Karl Francis directed *One of the Hollywood Ten*, a feature-length movie about the life of *Salt* director Herbert Biberman. It starred well-known Hollywood actors Jeff Goldblum and Greta Scaachi and production standards were high. Even so, it seems to have almost disappeared from mainstream audience venues much the way *Salt* did decades ago.

Anita Torres, the inspiration behind the Local 480 showing of *Salt*, is part of the revival movement. At 88 years old in 2014, she continues to promote the film as part of her association with the Salt of the Earth Labor College in Tucson, Arizona, where she now lives. She still remembers her winter visit to Trail in January 1954, and she still retells the same story she recounted to Local 480 about the history of *Salt* to audiences wherever she travels. “A struggle is a struggle,” she says, “and no matter whether it’s fifty or sixty or how many years, the struggle is still with us.”<sup>121</sup> Torres adds that the interest in *Salt* speaks to the hard times facing trade unions in the 21st century. Maybe, she says, it’s because “this movie is very good at showing what a union can do when we unite.”

Unfortunately, a majority of mine workers in her old union back in New Mexico did not agree when they voted to decertify what was once Mine-Mill Local 890. On 24 September 2014, members of the Steel Workers local at Chino Mine in Hurley, NM, voted 236 to 83 to end the legendary local. As the *Denver Post* reported, mine workers in Grant County “now won’t have union representation at any mine within the county.” Mine owners were “pleased with employee participation in the vote,” the *Post* article said.<sup>122</sup> Torres attributed the decertification to a lack of understanding of labour history in the region.

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that Lorence listed.

120. Lorence, *Suppression*, 1–2.

121. Anita Torres, phone interview conducted by Ron Verzuh, 30 July 2014.

122. “N.M. Miners’ Vote Decertifies Union,” *Denver Post*, 24 September 2014.

Joe Bernick, director of the Salt of the Earth Labor College, shared that view as did Leo Gerard, international Steel Workers president. Rumours circulated that the employer had hired many workers from outside the state and that they were unaware or didn't care about the *Salt of the Earth* legacy.

Despite the vote and some media reports gleefully announcing that the union of *Salt* fame was dead, the legacy of the film lives on. Unions in New Mexico celebrated the film at a commemorative event in March 2014 and a few months after the decertification vote, the Castle Theatre in Castlegar announced a historic matinee showing of *Salt* on 14 November 2014, just one month shy of the sixtieth anniversary of the Local 480 showing in the same theatre. The 200-seat cinema, built in the late 1940s and recently refurbished, was packed on that sunny, but chilly Sunday afternoon. Why had people come? One viewer said she came because she wanted to see "the power of solidarity." Another because "it's important not only to chronicle labour history but to keep it alive." A local labour leader was in tears when she said, "I've never been as proud to be a woman in the labour movement as I am today." Steel Worker Western District Director Steve Hunt was also present. "I hope we learn from this," he said after seeing *Salt*. "I hope we don't repeat the mistakes we made in the fifties where we persecute people who stand up and fight for their rights and the rights of others, more importantly."<sup>123</sup>

That same afternoon, city workers walked a picket line in front of Castlegar's city hall, and although it was not the violent confrontation that local viewers had seen recreated that Sunday, *Salt* still had the power to inspire resistance. After the screening, a postal worker stood up with a call for solidarity. "What I hope after this movie is that every person in this theatre today, and every person that we can talk to, will go on the ... picket line." Among the other viewers at the Castle Theatre that day was Katrine Conroy, a member of the provincial legislative assembly for West Kootenay. A few weeks later she rose in the legislature to commemorate the sixtieth anniversary showing of *Salt* in her riding. She praised Local 480 for its courageous 1954 showing of the film and its sponsorship of the anniversary showing. Unlike the days of the McCarthy witch hunts and the repressive measures that marked the Cold War 1950s, she said, "this time there was no fear of reprisal for either supporting the show or attending."<sup>124</sup>

A few months after Conroy spoke, the Canadian Conservative government introduced its anti-terrorist bill (C-51) thus falling in line with the Patriot Act that Republican majorities in the US Congress were in the process of renewing. Indeed, with the appearance of such invasive legislation in the 21st century, the

123. Steve Hunt and other commentators, videotaped by Ron Verzuh, Castlegar, BC, 14 November 2014.

124. MLA Katrine Conroy, Statements (Standing Order 25B) "Salt of the Earth Screening in Honour of Buddy DeVito," Debates of the Legislative Assembly (Hansard), Third Session, 40th Parliament, Victoria, BC, 26 November 2014.

political paranoia that surrounded *Salt* back in the 1950s seems closer at hand than ever before. Clearly the public fear generated during the McCarthy era is never far away nor is the need for the public resistance to political intolerance that Local 480 exhibited in showing the blacklisted film six decades ago.